



Photos: Swinglee Photos

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groom handler. It was late morning when we were finally able to set out behind whip Vicky Brennan who drove Elma, a 13.3hh Fell also to a Fenix Flyer. We were the last ones on to the obedience field and completed all the exercises to gain a pass, then it was off to the marathon course.

Elma is a pony whose happy pace is a steady trot, so we made good time on the first part of the course that enabled us to walk some of the last sections, as by then the sun was beating down unmercifully and there was little shade to be had.

The highlight of the course for me was the water obstacle. It was the first time I had come across one as a groom, so was thrilled that Vicky agreed to take us all through, not once but three times.

Celsie was not tempted to follow, preferring to keep her feet dry and skirt the edge of the water obstacle each time. Out on the course the views were amazing and we completed the required 10km within the allotted time. It was the first time I had worked my Dalmatian behind a carriage at a trials and had such fun as a groom that I was left wanting more.

If anyone in the Midlands region needs a groom, I'd love to come out on a regular basis. The event was an outstanding success and congratulations need to go to everyone involved in its organisation. The relaxed format encouraged a wonderful atmosphere enjoyed by the handlers with their horses, drivers and grooms and of course the all important dalmatians.

For more information on the British Carriage Dog Society and to become a member please visit www.carriagedog.org

Rolex and he completed the full 40km distance that is required to pass the gold class.

Coming over all spotty

Then it was the turn of the silver carriage dog entry, Chris Cleland who competed with her Dalmatian, Ozzy. As Chris was competing as a groom handler she took to the backstep behind whip Mandy Hawley who drove Simon, a 15.2hh KWPN to a Fenix Flyer.

Chris and Mandy were dressed to impress in their white silks with black spots and looked a perfect match for Ozzy. After successfully completing the all the obedience exercises, they set off around the cross country course to complete the 20km required to pass silver.

In the heat of the day

My Dalmatian, Celsie, and I had entered the bronze carriage dog. We had to wait until our whip returned from completing her road dog trial before we could set out, because I was a

also pass the vet check at the end (with silver and gold dogs also checked at mid-point). Each Dalmatian was awarded up to 200 marks for their fitness levels, based on their heart rate, temperature, mobility and condition and these marks contributed to their overall scores.

Making a splash

The day started with staggered start times with those entered in the gold classes going first, followed by the silver entries and finally those in the bronze. Vicky Brennan was first in the obedience field, competing for the road dog bronze with her Dalmatian, Gemma. Vicky was also driving her 13.3hh Fell, Elma, for my Dalmatian, Celsie, and me as I was competing as groom handler later in the day.

The first whip handler competitor was Mirnanda Purves who worked her Dalmatian, Splash and her Fell, Harry, with Laura Fraser as groom. After completing and passing all of the obedience exercises, they were the first carriage out onto the cross country course, which Splash completed within the allotted six hours to achieve an overall pass at carriage dog gold. Splash was one of the few Dalmatians to go through the water obstacle, not sure if that was because of the heat or if she was living up to her name.

Working in tandem

Julie Swindells was the next whip handler entry, she drove Emmy, a 14hh Fell x Thoroughbred with Phil Swindells as groom. Julie was the only handler working a two Dalmatian team, consisting of littermates Rolex and Clover. Clover received the 'Judges Special' for passing the obedience test with an outstanding score of 100%. Unfortunately, during the endurance test, before Clover could complete the distance, she scuffed a pad while out on the course. Although it was not causing Clover a problem, Julie agreed with the vet judge to withdraw her immediately to avoid any further damage. Julie continued the trial with

Above left Chris Cleland with Ozzy. Above right: Josie Kaal and Celsie competing in bronze carriage dog. Right: Julie and Phil Swindells with their Dalmatian team, Rolex and Clover.

